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Book Review

Researching Language Teacher Cognition and Practice: International Case Studies
Edited by Roger Barnard and Anne Burns. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2012. 186 pp. ISBN: 978-1-84769-789-5

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Many teachers have undoubtedly had a profound impact on their students but only recently did researchers begin to rigorously study *teacher cognition*, a fundamental concept defined as "what teachers know, believe, and think" (Borg, 2003, p. 81) and which, as Borg adds in the volume under review, is comprised of constructs such as teachers' "attitudes, identities and emotions" (p. 11). Teacher cognition directly relates to what teachers actually do in areas like lesson planning (Woods, 1996), grammar teaching (Borg, 2006) and extensive reading in higher education (Macalister, 2010). It is no easy task, however, to research what Borg here refers to as the "unobservable dimension of teaching" (p. 11). To delve into why teachers frequently show disparity between cognition and practice, institutional, cultural and situational contexts must be taken into account. This book, particularly captivating to readers interested in the cognition of language teachers, provides a valuable collection of case studies conducted in multifarious contexts, including a number of Asian countries (Malaysia, Vietnam, Japan and Timor-Leste) and New Zealand. It offers a strong Asian voice for English language education and presents individual situations of ESL/EFL teaching and learning.

There is much of value in this book but Simon Borg's opening chapter providing a contemporary and informative review of 25 studies on language teacher cognition alone is worth the price of the book. What might be the biggest challenges in the study of language teacher cognition in recent years? Borg points his finger at research methodology and how it is reported. Drawing on his background as an experienced teacher-educator in international TESOL contexts, he rightly acknowledges the complexity of classroom teaching. He explains that while often overlooked it is essential to know how to utilize a judicious blend of data collection methods and how to present accounts of classroom research in an "instructional rather than generically formulaic" (p. 26) manner. Equally important is precision in defining the key terms employed in teacher cognition research.

This multi-author volume is innovatively structured in such a way that each of the eight main chapters details a case study and its related methodological issue illustrated by an emergent researcher, followed by a critique from an internationally celebrated scholar in the field. This unique combination offers thought-provoking and alternative

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views on each study and allows room to discuss the associated methodological concerns. The reflective questions at the end of every chapter encourage readers to vigilantly ponder both the advantages and disadvantages of collecting data using the particular method under the spotlight.

The book explores a range of data collection strategies, from interviews (possibly the most frequently adopted strategy) to questionnaires, observation, focus groups, narrative frames, "think aloud" procedures, stimulated recall and oral reflective journals, all targeted on assessing language teacher cognition. Mastery of these strategies is not only essential to novice researchers and their supervisors (the intended readers of this book) but desirable to proficient qualitative researchers, and indeed anyone who enjoys reflecting upon diverse methodological approaches. In a particularly fascinating piece of expert commentary (in Chapter 3), Donald Freeman, in response to Andrew Gladman's use of focus groups in his case study, raises an intriguing and provocative thesis: "As a researcher, I think it borders on the naïve to simply say that people are telling you what they think" (p. 85). Given that getting participants to verbalize their thoughts appears simple and straightforward, researchers may be tempted to sidestep other kinds of complicated data collection methods. However, as Freeman shows, it is time for researchers, especially when doing elicitation research, to contemplate the issues of veridicality and validity.

The book explores several possible, but not exhaustive, ways to elicit data. It shows the value of adopting a flexible and well-tried approach to accommodate the varying nature of qualitative research studies, whether of language teaching and learning in specific contexts or of broader social issues. What the authors identify, in their distinct case studies, is the importance of being able to innovate, improvise, and adapt in a research journey. Perhaps the best lesson one can learn from the collective experience of the researchers in this book is J. D. Brown's comment that "If you don't find any surprises in your research, you're not doing it right" (p. 44).

The greatest value of the book goes beyond the discussion on how to research language teacher cognition; it is a quest to answer the question: How can we better study this specific domain despite the methodological challenges? It is a noble pursuit. How to conduct grounded analysis of data, though not within the scope of this book, is acknowledged by the editors as yet another important question that dedicated researchers would wish to further explore. It can only be hoped that this will be included in their next collection of papers.

About the reviewer

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